

Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Thursday, February 2, 2023
SB 51- Criminal Procedure - Reasonable Suspicion and Probable Cause - Cannabis

FAVORABLE

Dear Mr. Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Committee Members,

My name is Ron Williams Jr. I am a sixth generation Washingtonian and current resident of the District of Columbia, but I am a product of Prince George's County, Maryland. I attended and graduated from elementary, middle, and high school from Prince George's County Public Schools. I am a Maryland Farmer, Waterman, Father, Brother, Son and a clinical social worker's Baby-Daddy and I am here today to tell my story and express my support for Senate Bill 51.

On several occasions traveling through Prince George's County from my home to my farm on the Eastern Shore, I was stopped, searched, and pulled out of my car due to the officer saying they smelled "marijuana odor" in my car. In all of these instances, the Prince George's County police used the odor of marijuana to escalate the situation. And for every instance that they pulled me over, I denied them access to search my vehicle. They searched my vehicle anyway. I was unlawfully arrested after the search, considering the officer never found evidence of a crime. Because of case law at the time, the perceived smell of marijuana allowed law enforcement to pull me out of my car on the side of the highway, handcuff me, and hunt for evidence of a crime. The charges against me were almost immediately thrown out by a judge due to their lack of merit. Marijuana odor was used as a tool to justify state sanctioned harassment against me and other black males that look like me.

I am not alone in my experience. Marijuana odor has been used as a loophole to justify racial profiling for far too long. As we look forward to legalization, this body must ensure that the smell of a soon-to-be legal substance cannot be used to justify a stop, search, and seizure of my person and property.

For the reasons stated above, I urge the committee to pass Senate Bill 51.

Ronald Williams Jr